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Mark Zelcer

Reading the *Menexenus* Intertextually

Introduction

This essay argues for a specific reading of Plato's *Menexenus* that situates the dialog in certain kinds of intertextual relationships with Pericles' famous funeral oration. The interpretation offered here makes sense of the following puzzles about the *Menexenus*.[1] First, why is Aspasia (*qua* Aspasia[2]) the "real" author of the speech? Second, why is Aspasia the author of not only Socrates' speech, but Pericles' speech as well? In other words, why is Aspasia the author of Pericles' speech and also why is the person who wrote Socrates' speech the same as the person who wrote Pericles'? Third, why does the *Menexenus* make its points in the form of a funeral oration? Given everything else known about Plato's corpus, this text does not fit in with the others.

This essay makes sense of these and other puzzles by interpreting the dialog in a way that highlights the character of Aspasia in the context of this dialog. In the *Menexenus*' opening Socrates claims that Aspasia was the author of both the *Menexenus*' and Pericles' funeral orations. Prefacing his retelling of the speech, Socrates tells the young Menexenus that Aspasia "narrated for me the sort of things that ought to be said; some of these she came up with on the spur of the moment, and others she had previously prepared by gluing together leftovers from the time when, I believe, she was composing the funeral speech Pericles

1 Some of these questions were first raised by Charles Kahn ("Plato's funeral oration: The motive of the *Menexenus*," *Classical Philology* 58 (1963): 220 – 234. Reprinted in this volume.), but have largely been ignored in the secondary literature. The present approach differs considerably from Kahn's, however. Additionally, Nickolas Pappas and I deal with Kahn's questions pertaining to the *Menexenus*' history in Nickolas Pappas and Mark Zelcer, "Plato's Menexenus as a history that falls into patterns" (*Ancient Philosophy* 33.1 (2013): 19 – 31) and *Politics and Philosophy in Plato's* Menexenus (London: Routledge, 2015).

2 We will not consider the question of why Plato chose Aspasia *qua* metic, foreigner, woman, etc. I will show that Aspasia, *qua* individual most closely associated by the Athenian public with Pericles is a natural choice for this role, despite or independent of her race, sex, gender, immigration status, etc. I thus reject answers of the form: Plato chose Aspasia because she was a metic/woman/etc. and he needed a metic/woman/etc. to make point *x* (e. g. to indicate that the dialog is to be read as a parody or a commentary about the status of foreigners in Athens).

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delivered."[3] In Plato's account, in other words, Aspasia composed a speech for Pericles and used the leftover scraps of that speech that (for unstated reasons) Pericles did not recite, to teach Socrates how to deliver a funeral oration. In the logic of fiction, it makes sense to claim that one of the characters in your dialog wrote a speech for another. But, from the point of view of the author, it is rhetorically odd to claim that words spoken by someone else['s character[4]] (Pericles, in this case) were written by one of yours (Aspasia). Moreover, it is hard to see how the leftover pieces of a speech (essentially, the "outtakes" plus some new material) make up not only a coherent speech by themselves, but one with topics that considerably overlap with the original.[5] This paper will argue that paying attention to the characterization of Socrates' (Aspasia's) speech as glued-together leftovers from an original, provides significant insight into the nature of the text.

The glued-together nature of the speech is here illustrated with four examples. The first will show that the *Menexenus* creates a literary segue that bridges its own speech with Pericles'. The second example will show that (and how) it is possible to interpolate the *Menexenus*' text directly into Pericles speech in a way

3 236b. Translations are taken or adapted from Susan Collins and Devin Stauffer, *Plato's* Menexenus *and Pericles' Funeral Oration: Empire and the End of Politics* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 1999).

4 There is a sense in which the Pericles we are speaking about is Thucydides' character, since the version of Pericles' speech we have is not a verbatim report of the one delivered, but rather Thucydides' recollection of the relevant parts of the speech (I.22.1). Keep in mind however that this is likely the version that Plato knew and expected his contemporaries to be familiar with.

5 Numerous authors read the two texts together. Some read the *Menexenus* as a response to, improvement over, or parody of Pericles' oration (e. g. Charles Kahn ("Plato's Funeral Oration", 223), Stephen G. Salkever ("Socrates' Aspasian Oration: The Play of Philosophy and Politics in Plato's *Menexenus*," *American Political Science Review* 87.1 (1993): 133 – 143), and Daniel Boyarin (*Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 63 – 73), respectively), but Christopher P. Long's reading ("Dancing Naked with Socrates: Pericles, Aspasia and Socrates at Play with Politics, Rhetoric and Philosophy," *Ancient Philosophy* 23.1 (2003): 49 – 69) is closest to the present interpretation. Long encourages us to read the two speeches in dialog (50). This paper does the same though in a far more literal sense of "dialog" than Long intends. Long envisions the dialogs as consistent with one another and complementary (51), as when he reconciles Pericles' attribution of the equality of all Athenians to Athenian law with Aspasia's attribution of the same fact to Athenian *autochthony* (the myth describing Athenians as having been born from the earth) (61). Long's interpretation however fails to explain why Aspasia specifically was chosen, why she was made the author of Pericles' speech, or how or why competing visions of such fundamental issues as the (ideal) relationship between citizen and state in Athens could be reconciled in light of Plato's hostility towards Pericles in places, and general overall antipathy towards Periclean political ideology. The present interpretation accounts for these challenges and also addresses other problems about which Long's interpretation is silent.

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that appears to create a standard Platonic dialog. The third example will show how the *Menexenus* in various ways elaborates on and responds to a detail about burial that Pericles mentions in his speech. The fourth example will show how the *Menexenus* offers an alternative theory of Athenian self-reliance to one developed in Pericles' speech. Collectively these examples strengthen the case that the *Menexenus* is responding to Pericles' funeral oration, explaining how it is doing so.

A Monological Dialog

The interpretation to be presented here will benefit from Mikhail Bakhtin's[6] observation about Socratic dialogues.[7] He notes that Socratic dialogs are dialogical in the sense that "truth… is born *between people* collectively searching… in the process of their dialogical interaction." But, on Bakhtin's view, Plato's dialogicality is actually only one of *form*, the *content* is monological, i. e., only one point of view, in this case, the "author's," is expressed.[8] While Plato guides the reader along dialogically he rarely expresses two points of view; he does not entrust the reader to make up her own mind about the correct side. Platonic dialogs hardly allow for reconstructing arguments that are not Socrates'.

The lesson this essay applies from Bakhtin is that typical Socratic dialogs do not present two arguments. Instead, the dialog as a whole (though certainly not each character individually) presents a complete argument. Socratic dialogs make single unified points by having multiple characters contribute at once. Multiple characters do not create multiple lines of thought, but rather collective-

6 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 110.

7 See also e. g. Gerald M. Mara, *The Civic Conversations of Thucydides and Plato: Classical Political Philosophy and the Limits of Democracy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 128 – 129.

8 I am indebted to Daniel Boyarin's discussion (*Socrates*, 63 – 73) of Plato, Bakhtin, mono- and dialogicality and to his analysis of Midrashic intertextuality in his *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), especially his understanding of "cocitation" as one of many styles of Midrashic intertextuality whereby two [apparently unrelated] texts are merged to create a third "intertext" engendering multiple meanings. Midrash are Jewish Biblical homiletical works which were first written down between the 2nd and 9th centuries CE. Though hundreds of years after Plato, the fact that the Midrash (like the Bible before it) with its multiple lines of influence, exhibits a wide range of styles of intertextuality is telling. It suggests that such styles were available to ancient authors influenced by Greco-Roman thought.

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ly engender a unified argument.[9] This interpretation will assert that the *Menexenus* is neither merely response nor reaction but rather intertextually enmeshed with Pericles' speech. On this reading, the *Menexenus*' speech is seen as a constant counterpoint to Pericles' speech: both speeches together form a monological dialog that guides the reader in a single direction. Further, it is only by reading the two side-by-side that the reader can understand the dialog's point. Reading the *Menexenus*' speech without the Periclean background in fact makes less sense than reading it with Pericles' speech constantly in mind. Pericles plays the necessary part of Socrates' interlocutor allowing only one truth to emerge. Pericles serves merely as a typical Socratic foil for Plato's position.

It should be unsurprising that one would claim that the *Menexenus* is responding to or interacting with another text. There is ample evidence that much of Plato's writing responds to then-current intellectual debates. Gabriel Danzig[10] adduces evidence from throughout the Platonic corpus to show, among numerous other examples, that the *Apology* is more likely Plato's contribution to the subsequent controversy over whether or not Athens acted justly in executing Socrates than it was Socrates' actual defense in court. He further argues[11] that Plato was also involved in a *literary* rivalry with Xenophon, where both respond to known texts of the other. Danzig demonstrates that Plato seems to be responding to Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. He argues that these literary interactions are typically oblique (on both sides), assume knowledge on the reader's part of the original work that the author is responding to, rarely aspire to fidelity to the text of the other, and need not bother to name the other author. The present essay understands that similar rhetorical strategies are used in the *Menexenus*. So if the *Menexenus* is directly responding to and interacting with

9 Bakhtin's thesis, though not uncontested, seems appropriate here. First, the only other character in the *Menexenus* is Menexenus who contributes little of substance to the argument (though he contributes to the context). Second, on the reading we provide the interlocutor is Pericles. Long, 49–69, assumes that in some sense the *Menexenus* is building on Pericles' speech, which suggests that both Pericles and Aspasia speak for Plato. But the reasons provided in this paper suggest that Pericles cannot be speaking for Plato. If our case is at all compelling it is consistent with Bakhtin's thesis that Plato typically only makes one point and that Socrates is usually the one making it, and also supports the thesis that this holds even if the other character is not Plato's. See the discussion of Danzig's evidence below.

10 Gabriel Danzig, *Apologizing for Socrates* (Lanham: Lexington Publishers, 2010).

11 Gabriel Danzig, "Did Plato Read Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*?" in *Plato's* Laws: *From Theory into Practice*, ed. S. Scolnicov and L. Brisson (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2003), 286–297.

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another literary text, this is not demonstrating an isolated instance.[12] The present essay, in a sense, extends Danzig's theses about the way Plato interacted with his contemporaries and their texts. If the *Menexenus* is unique, it is only in the extent and possibly the style that it responds to another text, not in the fact that it does. Given the above constraints of the literary rivalries, we can only discover where the intertextual work is via internal evidence such as is presented in this essay and let that speak for itself.

The present interpretation of the *Menexenus*, despite superficial appearances, preserves both the monologicality of content – a series of Plato's arguments giving Socrates the final say, and the dialogicality of Plato's method – a conversation between Pericles and Socrates. This essay takes the *Menexenus* to be explicitly telling us to read the dialog in this way when he describes the two orations as originally having been one speech that got cut up. By having Socrates recite what is referred to as the "leftover bits," Plato tasks the reader with putting the parts back together, the parts originally composed by Aspasia as one speech.

To substantiate this interpretation, it is the burden of this essay to show that it is possible to reconstruct the "original speech" that Aspasia created for Pericles and to undo the violence done to it when it was "cut up." The essay must also show that the speeches together can form a monological dialog that shows Socrates discoursing with Pericles, but with only one point of view emerging in the process.[13] This is done by juxtaposing the two speeches in a variety of intertextually related ways. Each of the following four examples (concerning the role of women, the nature of the regime, the burial of the dead, and Athenian self-reliance) shows Plato's text interacting with the text of Pericles' oration, though each shows it doing so in a different way.

12 Additionally, S. C. Todd, in *A Commentary on Lysias, Speeches 1–11* (New York: Oxford. 2008), 156, argues that there are intertextual elements (albeit of a different sort than the ones we present) in the *Menexenus* that allude to Lysias' oration.

13 Though there is no way to substantiate this claim either way, it is possible that Socrates actually had conversations about these topics with Pericles and related them to Plato. There is reason to believe that Socrates had been close enough with members of Pericles' household to have encountered Pericles as well. He was well acquainted with Alcibiades, Pericles' foster son (*Symposium* 213b – 223a); Aspasia, Pericles' mistress; he had encountered Pericles' children Paralus and Xanthippus (*Protagoras* 315a) and Pericles the Younger (*Memorabilia* 3.5). (See Pappas and Zelcer, *Politics and Philosophy*, 24 – 25, for discussion.) Therefore, this dialog might be speaking more to the historicity of events of Socrates' life than is usually recognized.

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Example 1: The Role of Women

The first clue pointing to the nature of the dialog in a monological interaction with Pericles' speech comes from the segue at the beginning of the *Menexenus*' speech. The opening part of the dialog's frame tells us that Aspasia will be the real speaker. The speech itself opens with a discussion of motherhood. But this is an odd choice of topic to open a funeral oration.

Or perhaps it is not so odd. This opening appears to offer an immediate retort to Pericles' speech. Juxtaposing the end of Pericles' oration and the beginning of the *Menexenus*, we can notice that Pericles winds down his speech with an afterthought in which he offers that if he must deign to address the women in the audience he would note that they are virtuous only insofar as they are neither heard nor heard of (II.45). Such was the "consolation" Pericles proffers to those who that season lost their sons and husbands. But pushing people into the shadows, as Pericles does with this remark, does not console them. Rather Pericles provides an unsubtle attempt at civic education that reminds women who had just lost their civic identities (which comes with losing their husbands and other male relatives) how disenfranchised they really are. This cannot but anger the women, the ostensibly intended target of the consolation. The other women present also know that if Pericles gets his way and the war continues, this time next year, they may too lose their men.[14]

Socrates' speech which otherwise has nothing in particular to say about women opens with a corrective to Pericles' closing comments by declaring that Aspasia (a widow of sorts[15]) is about to publicly deliver a funeral speech. Socrates is her proxy ventriloquizing, using an empathetic feminine perspective. The opening discussion of Aspasia's speech – motherhood (that which for Plato makes women women) – is not just about women, but also highlights a woman's

14 This reminder also rebukes Pericles for failing to understand the souls of his audience, at least the women in it–grounds enough to disqualify one as a good rhetorician (*Phaedrus* 270b6).
15 Two caveats: 1) as part of the war strategy, Pericles had all the Athenians from the countryside stay within the city's walls to ride out the war. Athens' water and sanitation infrastructure was not capable of handling the influx of people and a plague ensued. (This explanation for the plague was not understood in ancient times.) Not long after the death of his two legitimate sons, Pericles himself died of the plague. However, 2) for legal reasons, Aspasia and Pericles could not be technically married in Athens as she was not Athenian. The actual status of their relationship is unclear today. Aspasia might have been something akin to Pericles' mistress or perhaps what would now anachronistically be called a "common law wife." Thus to the extent that Aspasia and Pericles were coupled, Aspasia was widowed.

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ability to speak virtuously and to put on top of the agenda the very issue that defines her.

Motherhood, as Christopher Long points out, is an important theme for the *Menexenus*. It is Aspasia's metaphor for representing the relationship between the state and the citizen; the mother is the state who nurtures the individual[16] and expects loyalty and respect in return.[17] Whereas for Pericles the metaphor representing the relationship between the state and individual has been convincingly shown to be the more "egalitarian" relationship between male lovers. Socrates' retort thus speaks to Pericles' slight against women, but it also speaks against Pericles' way of thinking about the role of the state. Pericles' analogy for everyone in the state makes everyone in it male, leaving no room for females or a feminine voice. This is another aspect of female invisibility challenged by Socrates' speech.[18]

The smooth segue from the subject near the end of Pericles' speech to the feminine authorial voice expressing the dominant metaphor for the state that opens Socrates' is a good first sign that they are meant to be read [at least] contiguously. Plato has Aspasia herself speak as a counterpoint to Pericles' dismissal of the demographic with the most reason to be bitter about the war. Pericles sent their men off to die, and the widows and mothers grieving at the funeral are told that their lives are only meaningful to the extent that their voices go unheard.[19]

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16 Étienne Helmer's paper (in this volume) takes the concept of *trophē* (rearing) as a key to reading the *Menexenus*, comparing it with the same term in the *Republic* and the *Laws*.

17 This is consistent with similar themes in the *Republic* (414d ff) and *Crito* (51c – 52c).

18 See 11.43.1. Also, S. Sara Monoson ("Citizen as *erastes:* Erotic imagery and the idea of reciprocity in the Periclean funeral oration," *Political Theory* 22.2 (1994): 253 – 276) argues that Pericles approaches citizenship as *erastes*. Long, "Dacing Naked", 49 – 69, suggests that Plato picked up on Pericles' approach and offered motherhood to complement it. The present interpretation only slightly relies on the fact that Plato read Pericles as Monoson does, though our interpretation is certainly consistent with it.

19 Mary Beard has pointed out in public lectures that the earliest recorded instance of a man telling a woman that her voice is not to be heard in public is in the *Odyssey* where Telemachus tells his mother Penelope that "speech will be the business of men" just before he sends her upstairs to her weaving (quoted here: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/14/mary-beard-vocal-women-treated-freakish-androgynes). In 1758 Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), 48) invokes, with approval, the same sentiment as Pericles' – that women are best honored when they are spoken of the least. In 1759, one year later, in England, we find an early direct criticism of Pericles' treatment of women (see Edward Bentham, *Two Orations in Praise of Athenians Slain in Battle, from the Greek With Reflexions* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1759), 3). For a more nuanced politically sensitive interpretation of Pericles' admonition to the women see Loma Hardwick, "Philomel

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Socrates uses the concept of motherhood to respond to another of Pericles' claims. Pericles' concept of the comparative virtue of the ancestors is exactly the opposite of the one Socrates will present. In Pericles' telling the ancient ancestors who were here literally forever ago ("there has never been a time when they did not inhabit this land") are worthy of some praise, but our more immediate ancestors who added to the greatness of the ancients are worthy of more and we ourselves are worthy of even more praise than our parents. It was Pericles' generation that made Athenian military prowess as formidable as it is (II.36). Thus on Pericles' telling, the further removed from the ancestors one gets, the greater the Athenians are.

The discussion of *autochthony* in the *Menexenus* on the other hand disputes both that Athenians have been in Athens forever and that the farther back we go, the less praiseworthy are the ancestors. Socrates claims that there must have been a first mother to start the Athenian "race." This first mother was the earth herself whose "descendants," actual human mothers, are but imitations of the primeval mother earth. It was this mother earth that gave Athenians their first nourishment and armament. The *Menexenus* then identifies greatness with the ancient ancestors and not Pericles' generation, and the ancient ancestor is identified as the being which all women imitate – woman writ large, Athens herself. It would be hard to make the case that the object doing the imitating (women) is greater than the object being imitated (the Earth), surely it would be difficult to put such an argument in Socrates' mouth. Thus for the *Menexenus* the innate greatness as well as the significant education of Athenians comes from the ancient ancestors and the gods and gets transmitted to the more recent generations by a process of imitation, whereas for Pericles his generation builds on the greatness of ancestors to create an even stronger people.

Autochthonous birth in Socrates' speech (like the *Republic*'s noble lie) also has a valuable explanatory role that interacts with another Periclean point. Pericles claims that the reason Athenians do not do bad things to one another is that they respect the law (II.37). But Pericles has no way to explain *why* Athenians respect the law or each other. As Pericles tells it, the reasoning is circular: we respect the law that tells us to respect each other because we respect each other. Socrates uses motherhood again to give a clear reason for the Periclean thesis of Athenian mutual respect. He explicitly uses the *autochthonous* birth

and Pericles: Silence in the Funeral Speech", *Greece and Rome* 40 (1993): 147–162. Wm. Blake Tyrrell and Larry J. Bennett ("Pericles' muting of women's voices in Thuc. 2.45.2," *The Classical Journal* 95.1 (1999): 37–51) offer a more sympathetic reading of Pericles. But Pericles' actual intention is not our concern. We are considering how Plato, a generation later, expected his contemporaries to understand Pericles.

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of Athenians, which makes them all siblings, to explain why they are driven to pursue legal equality and treat each other as legal peers (239a).

Thus one need only think about how Socrates talks about women to have ample opportunity to reflect on the intertextual dialog that the *Menexenus* creates with Pericles' speech. In none of these aspects is Socrates found to be in agreement with Pericles, but rather always squarely in opposition to him. In each instance, we see Pericles acting as the interlocutor taking a stance on some issue pertaining to woman and womanhood that the *Menexenus* in typical fashion enters into dialog with and attempts at least a counterposition, if not an outright refutation, giving Socrates the final say on the matter.

Example 2: The Nature of the Regime

The contrast between the way the two speeches treat women, womanhood, and motherhood is telling and can provide a basis for dialog between Socrates and Pericles, but let us get closer to the texts and examine the way our interlocutors understand the Athenian regime. This may provide a way of seeing the texts interact more vividly.

Traditionally Pericles' oration has been read as a display of a prominent leader presenting a laudable version of Athenian democratic self-understanding. The emphasis on democracy is something that runs against the political preferences for rule by the best that is articulated in many passages of the Platonic corpus. For Socrates, taking a civic interest in politics is hardly sufficient and certainly does not qualify one for political office, as he intimated to Menexenus in the dialog's frame (234a). Aptitude and education (234a) are required for good leadership, and neither of those is doled out evenly to all. The *Menexenus* rejects the Periclean populist democracy that got Athens into the Peloponnesian War and later killed Socrates. Ideally, the Athenian regime is led by a sovereign wise philosopher-warrior who is not accountable to the people any more than a captain is answerable to his crew. This debate about how to understand Athenian greatness plays out in the two dialogs clearly. Consider the following which is taken almost verbatim from the two speeches:

> **Socrates:** How, Pericles, would you describe the nature of the Athenian regime?
> **Pericles:** Because it is administered with a view not to the few but to the many, it has been called by the name "democracy" (II.37.1).
> **Socrates:** The same regime existed then as now – an aristocracy, in which at present we live as citizens as we have almost continually since [the time of those ancients who came before us]. ... Have we not always had kings, sometimes by birth, at other times chosen (238c – d)?
> **Pericles:** Yes, [but] one who is poor but able to do some good for the city is not prevented

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from doing so by the obscurity of his position. It is in a free manner that we govern our common affairs ... (II.37.1).
Socrates: [But] although the multitude has control over most of the city's affairs, they give the ruling offices and authority to those who are consistently deemed to be the best (238d).
Pericles: [Yes Socrates,] with regard to the question of merit, as each is well reputed in some respect, so he is preferred in honor in our common affairs, not so much on the basis of lot as on the basis of virtue (II.37.1).
Socrates: But unlike what happens in other cities, no one has ever been left out because of weakness or poverty or the obscurity of his father, nor has anyone ever been honored for the opposite (238d). [We say then] although one man calls her a democracy, another something else that pleases him, in truth she is an aristocracy with the approval of the multitude (238c).

The discussion of the Athenian *politeia* in the *Menexenus* is sometimes dismissed as merely a subversion of Thucydides' text.[20] But it appears to be more than that. And although the claim here is not that the *Menexenus* was written to allow for the dialog above to be presented this way, it does support the present interpretation that the *Menexenus* is amenable in some places to mesh with Pericles' speech so smoothly. The remainder of this essay provides other *kinds* of examples of intertextual narratives emerging from the two speeches.

It should also be noted that we are easily able to construct this dialog in a way that should be familiar as a standard Platonic monological dialog. It follows a model now familiar from Mitchell Miller's analysis of other dialogs. Simplifying somewhat: 1) There is the *elicitation of the interlocutor's opinion* – given in Pericles' oration; 2) followed (more or less) by *a basic refutation by the philosophical protagonist* – in Socrates' assertion of a continuous polity and his odd reminder that Athens has a king, something technically true, though not the way any Athenian of the time would have seen it;[21] 3) *an attempt by a philosopher to offer a reorienting in a philosophical light* – where Socrates explains that despite the democracy, Athens has always been ruled by the best; 4) finally, *a resumption of the initial discussion in light of the attempt to reorient* – where Socrates gives what he

20 E. g. Todd, *Commentary*, 154 and Paul O. Mahoney, "The origin of the olive: On the dynamics of Plato's *Menexenus*," *Polis* 27.1 (2010): 38 – 57.

21 The context here should serve to answer part of Charles Kahn's question ("Plato's Funeral Oration", 220 – 234) regarding why the *Menexenus*' speech claims that Athens was an aristocracy despite the fact that it was a democracy with only a nominal king who had a largely ceremonial and religious function. My answer is that mentioning this is important as part of his argument about the nature of the regime, though Socrates is idealizing a bit. Our interpretation makes the statement natural. Most other interpretations must explain it away.

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takes to be the true (ideal?) nature of the Athenian regime as an actual aristocracy that has the approval of the people.[22]

Thus we see at least for this one bit of philosophical discussion how it is possible to "reconstruct" the "original dialog" that "Aspasia wrote" for Pericles. And it is also clear what Socrates means when he says that Pericles "left out" bits that are "put back" in Aspasia's speech. This is put in a familiar Platonic style that looks like a typical monological dialog derived from the two speeches in a way that shows that Socrates' speech complements Pericles'.

Example 3: Burial of the Dead

Our third example concerns the burial of those who fell in battle. In Pericles' panegyric he praises the dead *en masse* and claims that the fact that they were killed in service of Athenian empire is *prima facie* evidence of their virtue (II.42.2). For such sacrifice they deserve eternal commemoration that need not be terrestrial or tied to a particular place and time. Their burial markers may memorialize them but because they are so illustrious the whole Earth serves as a burial place and their commemoration in the minds of men is more significant than any physical marker could be (II.43.2–3).

This remark is reminiscent of the brouhaha Socrates generated in his one brief political moment as jury foreman deciding the fate of sea captains who, because of a storm, abandoned the dead at sea after the Battle of Arginusae. Socrates held up the proceedings on a procedural point of law that mandated that the captains be tried individually, not collectively.[23] That sea battle took place

22 This view is first described in Mitchell Miller's *The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980), xvii–xviii. Miller claims (123n38) that this analysis also applies to monologues like the *Menexenus* and the *Apology*, but gives no indication how such an analysis would work. Jeffrey Turner (in his paper in this volume) attempts to fit the *Menexenus* into Miller's model using only features internal to the text of the *Menexenus* itself. I heartily thank him for bringing this to my attention at the Penn conference. Similarly, Christopher Rowe, in *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 10–12, in the context of a nuanced and related discussion of the Platonic mode of dialog in written form in particular, claims that the *Menexenus* in many ways behaves like the other dialogs, despite being a dialog only "in formal terms" (14n43). He too declines to spell out how to treat the *Menexenus* (10n28) and gives no indication of how to think about the *Menexenus* as a written dialog in the same way we would think about the others.

23 See Debra Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2002), 79–82, for a summary of what is known of the trial of the Captains.

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many years after Pericles' funeral speech but exposed a brutal fact about democracies that permanently influenced Socrates' political philosophy: it allowed "democratic" "mobs" to violate their own laws. Had Pericles' democratic followers really believed his assertion about the real value of the eternal resting place of the war dead being in the minds of men (or for that matter had they heeded his remark on Athenians' respect for their own laws (II.37)), calmer heads may have prevailed with a separate legal trial for each defendant.

Important for us to note is the generally overlooked fact that this trial had been Aspasia's last hope.[24] Pericles the Younger, the son of Aspasia and Pericles, was one of the Captains in the Battle of Arginusae who returned to Athens to face what he may have expected (hoped?) would be a fair or even sympathetic trial. (He was, after all, the son of Pericles, even his namesake!) But the Athenians were not at all sympathetic. After Pericles the Younger was executed along with the other defendants who returned to Athens to face trial (some fled instead), Aspasia had the remaining few years of her life to wonder what would have been had Socrates prevailed at her son's trial. Could a non-democratic trial, judged by laws instead of angry and emotional Athenians have saved her son? Under such circumstances any mother would have held out hope that the same court that made a legal exception naturalizing Pericles the Younger would make an exception here too and try him as an individual Captain apart from the others, especially since it was unclear which Captains were really at fault.

Pericles' sentiment about the whole world being a burial place for virtuous men was clearly lost on the democracy so eager to embrace the suffrage, entitlements, empire and its necessary wars that Pericles stood for. At the very least the democracy did not apply Pericles' "wisdom" about burial to Pericles the Younger who was killed for the crime of failing to return Athenian bodies for burial in Athenian soil. The *Menexenus* responds to this in two parts. First by recalling and lamenting the incident of the trial of the Captains (243c) and second by invoking the myth of Athenian *autochthony*, that Athenians, unlike other Greeks,

24 Aspasia's role as a grieving mother who had lost a son to the trial of the Captains is not accounted for in any literature I am aware of. Even Madeleine M. Henry (*Prisoner of History: Aspasia of Miletus and her biographical tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 16) confines her discussion of Aspasia-as-mother to such asides as speculation about Pericles the Younger's lack of responsibility to care for his parents in their old age, a fact that is partially moot to the extent that Aspasia outlived her son. Though she mentions the trial, its impact on Aspasia's life is overlooked. Aspasia actually likely outlived her son by about 6 years (assuming the battle of Arginusae and the trial immediately afterward took place in 406 and the, albeit, more speculative claim that Aspasia lived to around 400).

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are born from the earth (237b). Reminding the audience of the important relationship that they Athenians have with the earth counters the idea that their actual burial place is unimportant, especially when the "burial" does not only not take place in Athens, it is not even in the earth, but at sea. It is easy to see Plato's reply to Pericles' dismissal of the importance of Athenian soil for the Athenians and it is easy to see why he would want to reply. Bringing up the trial responds to Pericles and shows that Athenians typically do believe that the Athenian earth is quite important as a burial place (otherwise why the haste to convict the Captains?) and also that they did not take everything Pericles said seriously. The *autochthony* myth is Plato's argument.[25]

Aspasia had been Pericles' mistress and by various accounts a thoughtful person in her own right (e. g. Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* III.14). If anyone bought into the Periclean ideal, it was her; she is represented as even having written a speech extolling it! Their son, about 15 when his father and half-brothers died in the plague, went on some years later to captain a warship in furtherance of his father's ideals and was killed not by the war but by the ideals. It is therefore natural to think that Aspasia experienced a change of heart about her political ideology; and for all we know she was the most high profile person in Athens to do so. If anyone would come to regret advocating for Periclean democracy and want to write a corrective, it would be the woman who lost her only son (we know of) to it. Moreover, the only person we know of who tried to save her son from the "democratic mob" was Socrates. A contemporary audience would have appreciated this reason which makes Aspasia a natural choice as the author of a dialog that is both Periclean and anti-Periclean, that best represents Pericles' voice and also best represents the changed heart that comes from burying a son and lover.[26] She of all people could naturally be portrayed convincingly as having once been pro-Pericles but now sympathetic with Socrates. This is why she was made the author of both speeches – she may have been the only plausible candidate and of the people known to us now, she is certainly the best.

25 For broader discussion of the autochthony myth and its wider context see Nickolas Pappas's "Autochthony in Plato's Menexenus," *Philosophical Inquiry* 34.1/2 (2011): 66 – 80.

26 Aspasia was well-known to ancient Athenians. She was a public figure in virtue, at least, of her association with Pericles. She was an object of mockery for the playwrights as well as of gossip that was transmitted through the time of Plutarch. Is the fact that she spoke out against her popular and dead husband part of what made her the object of scorn by the poets? Possibly. Such details are lost to history. However, recall that Pericles may have, for political reasons, created a taboo against the widows speaking out against the war. See Henry, *Prisoner of History*, for a discussion of Aspasia's biographical tradition.

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Anyone, real or imaginary, could have been the author of the speeches. Portraying the author of the two speeches as the same individual, namely, Aspasia, suggests that the audience was not meant to take this fact as ironic or coincidental. If Aspasia was tied in the public imagination to Periclean democracy and if she was subsequently thought of as a grieving mother, it would have been cruel (or at least "not funny"), even some 14 years after her death (assuming a 386 date of composition), to make her the butt of a joke. The ribbing she took in the *Acharnians* was as a widow to a famous statesman, but she was still almost twenty years away from witnessing the democracy execute her son.

Were the reasons to put Aspasia as the author of both speeches not evident to the audience of the *Menexenus* and had Aspasia been seen as a distraction or an object of mockery in the dialog, the *Menexenus* (and its author) faced the prospect of being perceived as cruelly mistreating a widow and grieving mother of a citizen in a funeral oration, no less, which clearly alludes to the death of her son. The literary gain in mocking Aspasia would thus have to be quite significant and unsubtle. Thus the decision to use Aspasia as the author of both the speeches makes sense and the expectation was that a contemporary audience would understand this.

Example 4: Self-reliance

It was already mentioned that Pericles credits his own generation of Athenians for their military prowess, whereas Socrates credits the gods and their interaction with the ancients with Athens' initial military training. Oddly too, Pericles' Athens is not only militarily self-reliant, but is easily so because of her way of life (II.39.4).

But Pericles' self-reliance is more thoroughgoing than simply not requiring military training. Not only does Pericles deny that individual Athenians need military training, but also he touts the states' go-it-alone military self-reliance (II.36.3, II.39.2) and denies that Athens needs military allies to go to war. In response, the *Menexenus* replies not exactly with an argument against self-reliance, but with a discussion of Athens' military history that is 1) replete with mentions of Athenian battles that were simply not and probably could not be fought alone and 2) arranges the history in such a way as to explicate *why* Athens does not fight alone.

The *Menexenus*' lengthy historical section begins the discussion of the Persian War by mentioning the battle of Marathon but without the Spartan (or Plataean) contribution. This is technically more-or-less accurate; Spartans did not fight in the battle (and the Platean contribution was minimal) but reports of

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the imminent arrival of Spartan fighters caused Persia to make tactical mistakes and suffer significant casualties (Collins and Stauffer, *Plato's Menexenus*, 41n16). Such an omission would have seemed odd, though not *that* odd, to ancient readers.[27] But this minor incongruity serves to perk up the readers' ears and prime them to notice the subsequent discussion of Athenian military alliances. The speech refers to the battle of Plataea, the Eurymedon, and Tanagra (just to name those from the Persian War) that Athens did not fight alone but rather with help from other Greek states (auxiliaries). The funeral oration in the dialogue exposes Pericles as making an argument about Greek life and military strategy that runs contrary to the most basic facts of Greek military history that someone in the position of *strategos* should know well, as would many ordinary Athenians.

Besides disputing Pericles' emphasis on Athenian ability to exercise power alone, the alliances that are mentioned also serve to counter Pericles' claim regarding the value of Athenian cosmopolitanism (II.39.1). After all, would not a society that valued openness to the extent Pericles claimed for Athens make enough friends not to have to fight and die alone? For Pericles, the city and all of her professions are open to foreigners, yet in war she fights without friends. For Socrates, Athens is a leader that protects other states from enslavement, even goes to war on their behalf (242a), yet remains culturally and ethnically free of outside influence (245d). The *Menexenus* exhibits neither the go-it-alone hubris of Pericles nor the self-absorbed belief that Athens is the only city worth keeping free. Pericles' Athens had friends but no allies, while Socrates' had allies without needing friends.

The kinds of alliances the *Menexenus* claims Athens engaged in should be familiar. The *Menexenus* takes pains to set up a history that is dominated by a tripartite division of peoples: Athenians, other Greeks, and barbarians,[28] which turn out to be analogous (isomorphic) to the two other tripartite divisions in the *Republic*.[29] The Athenians are to the guardians and reason as other Greeks are to the auxiliaries and spiritedness, and barbarians are to the producers and appetite. The guardian in a *polis* is to be the philosophical military leader and the best of the auxiliaries. But the guardian is not responsible for doing all the fighting and law enforcement himself (or herself). He is responsible for

27 K. R. Walters, "'We fought alone at Marathon': Historical falsification in the Attic funeral oration," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 124.3/4 (1981): 204 – 211.

28 Another point of divergence: Pericles lumps together wars fought against other Greeks with wars fought against barbarians (II.36.4), whereas Plato takes pains to talk about how Athens fights differently against other Greeks than she does against barbarians (242d).

29 For a full discussion, see Pappas and Zelcer 2013, "Plato's *Menexenus*," 19 – 31.

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leading the auxiliaries into battle and making the strategic-level decisions. The auxiliaries, who embody courage, fight for the good of the *polis* as a whole and are responsible for tactics.

Translating this to the world stage, the *Menexenus* conceives of it as the responsibility of the Athenians to lead the other Greeks to battle to promote global stability and freedom (from slavery). Athens does not fight alone because that is not her role.[30] Thus the kind of self-reliance that the dialogue argues that Athens exhibits or ought to exhibit is not one in which she needs no allies. Athens does not usually fight alone, nor need she. She taught others courage so they can fight under her leadership to advance the goals of freedom.

So once again, we see Socrates responding to Pericles' speech in a way that if the two expressed views are juxtaposed we have Pericles offering a position on Athenian military strategy and hegemony on the world stage, and Socrates replying and developing an alternative theory about what the world really is (or should be) like, what Athens' role of leader ought to be, and why it does not square with Pericles' theory. The options are binary. One either has/needs allies or one does not, one leads or does not. Socrates' speech thus disputes another Periclean claim.

Who is Menexenus?

If, as we argue, the *Menexenus* is part of a dialog between Socrates and Pericles, who is Menexenus?[31] Though the evidence allows no definitive conclusions, it is possible, on the present reading, to see Menexenus as a proxy for Pericles. Let us review what the dialog tells us about who Menexenus is.

1) Menexenus' house has always provided a ruler and Menexenus is next in line (234b).
2) Menexenus is considering a public undertaking while still young, perhaps too young (234a – b).
3) Menexenus tells us that he is waiting in the Council Chamber for the Council to choose someone to deliver the oration (234a).
4) Menexenus is incredulous that Aspasia could write good speeches (236c, 249d).

30 See Mark Zelcer, "Plato on International Relations," *The Philosophical Forum* 48.3 (2017): 325 – 339.

31 Pappas and Zelcer, *Politics and Philosophy*, 42 – 45, review the literature discussing the identity of Menexenus. See also Cliff Robinson's paper in this volume for an alternative view of the role of Menexenus in the dialog.

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5) Menexenus is very familiar with Aspasia (249d) and not surprised that she taught Socrates rhetoric (235e).

These details all fit Pericles better than anyone known to us including the other Menexenuses in the Platonic prosopography. Replace "Menexenus" with "Pericles" in the frame of the dialog and we have a perfectly coherent story.

The fact that Pericles was ambitious and precocious was likely well-known to Athenians. He was the *chorēgos* for Aeschylus' *Persians* while in his mid-twenties when the minimum age was 30.[32] Hence the allusion to his undertaking a public function like a funeral oration while too young (2). He was also well known as having descended from Athenian leadership. Pericles' father Xanthippus had been an Athenian leader and his mother, who is believed to have made Xanthippus' career, was from a powerful noble family that had been influential in Athens for generations. Hence (1), the allusion to a long line of leaders. The fact that he was hanging around the Council Chamber angling to be chosen to speak sounds like something that could have been a running joke in Athens. The well-known funeral oration we have been discussing, was after all, Pericles' second. The first one he delivered was for the dead of the battle of Samos where Athens and Miletus trounced Samos in a significant naval clash. Thus (3), someone who managed to be chosen twice could easily be thought of as the kind of person who waits around the Agora and Council Chamber for such opportunities. And those who wait for such opportunities probably wait around prepared to deliver speeches. Menexenus hints that the speaker will be unprepared, but Socrates quickly counters by pointing out that we can expect to hear a preexisting speech. According to the *Suda*,[33] Pericles was the first to deliver prepared speeches, all of those prior to Pericles having been improvised.

The details in the dialog about Aspasia are also consistent with what we know Plato writes of Pericles. That Pericles knows Aspasia well and knows her reputation as a teacher of rhetoric (5), is unsurprising (though not necessarily unique to Pericles). That Pericles cannot recognize a good speech (4) is evidenced by the fact that here Plato has Aspasia write his speeches and elsewhere we are told that Pericles does not even understand his own good speeches (*Protagoras* 329a).

In the frame Socrates, uncharacteristically, does not bother to argue with Menexenus. It is possible that Socrates had some reason for treating Menexenus as special despite his arrogance in thinking he can take to public service so prema-

32 See Nails, *The People of Plato*, 225.

33 See the discussion in Pappas and Zelcer, *Politics and Philosophy*, 59.

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turely. Alternatively, if the speech itself is a dialog, there is no need to get into a substantive discussion in the frame.

The details we are given about Menexenus, except for his name, are thus consistent with everything we know about Pericles' life. At this point it is then reasonable to ask if, as this essay has been claiming until now, the *Menexenus* is to be read as a monological dialog, with Pericles as Socrates' interlocutor, why not just write it as one?

There are a number of reasons, which when combined, serve to provide a strong deterrent to the text being written in a manner that appears to be directly interacting with Pericles' speech. First, we can try to imagine what such a dialog would have looked like. It would have been a text whose sole purpose is to refute another text. Ancient evidence[34] (not as ancient as Plato though old enough that we should weigh its sensibilities heavier than our own) suggests that such a practice was seen as unbecoming. Additionally, such a text, unlike a dialog, a speech, or a history book, is as far as we know unprecedented in Plato's time. As far as we know, no model existed in Greek to write a commentary on another's text, let alone a text that absorbed another text in a straightforward way. As Danzig's evidence noted above shows, Plato did however write texts that obliquely interacted with others.

We also know from the *Phaedrus* (274c ff.) that Plato is sensitive to the limitations of the written word in general. One way in which the written word is inferior to oral discourse is in its inability to respond to different people differently. A written word is final and does not give the author the ability to clarify or tailor the presentation to the soul of the listener. The dialogical format somewhat compensates for that, to an extent such as writing allows, and it provides the general freedom to anticipate a variety of types of objections and concerns. Tailoring a dialog to respond to just one person would be unnecessarily restrictive. As it is given in the present interpretation, it is a speech, with all the limitations and benefits that this kind of rhetoric comes with and it is simultaneously a reply to Pericles. This style allows an author to get a bit more mileage out of the written word than he could get otherwise.

There is also more in the *Menexenus* than just a reply to one person. The *Menexenus* can be read as a stand-alone document, but framing it as a direct response to Pericles threatens two things: first, it ties the dialog to Pericles' oration in a way that burdens the reader to understand the context of both speeches. This is one way the *Menexenus* can be read, but surely not the only way. Second-

34 L. G. Westerink (Trans. and ed.), *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1962), 49.

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ly, it enmeshes Plato's legacy as a speechwriter with Pericles and leaves him open to easy public comparison in a way he may not have felt comfortable with.

Finally, a standard Platonic dialog would have simply been impolitic in this case. The *Menexenus* is a response to Pericles' legacy. Had Pericles not still been venerated in Plato's time, that is to say, had Thucydides not argued that it was Pericles' successors that really made the war go badly for Athens and not Pericles, and had people not believed Thucydides' analysis, there would have been no need for a Platonic response in the *Menexenus*. The people did not hold Pericles culpable for the Peloponnesian War or its consequences. Reacting to the Periclean legacy suggests that Pericles and by extension Thucydides' interpretation of his rule, was still dominant at the time Plato was writing. Given his relationship with the post-war tyranny and also to Socrates, Plato was thereby not in a position to criticize Pericles openly and with impunity. It is one thing to write another funeral speech to put out among the many that must have been in circulation at the time, it is another to openly criticize a popular political figure whose name still loomed large in the minds of Athenians. Similarly, it is one thing to criticize a sophist like Gorgias, however popular among the elite, and it is another to come out harshly against a popular politician. Therefore, it seems reasonable to think that it is a wiser decision to write a funeral oration, and even have it stand out as anomalous in his corpus (which was likely small as of the writing of the *Menexenus*), than for Plato to dedicate a whole dialog to directly criticizing Pericles openly.

A Final Clue

We end with a final clue that attests to the monological and dialogical nature of the *Menexenus*. When we think about the two speeches in a fine-grained manner, it is important not to overlook the coarse view, the complete texts and contexts, both of the *Menexenus*' speech and Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* in which Pericles' speech is embedded. In a manner of speaking the speeches and histories are negative images of one another: Pericles' speech is a piece of political *logos* embedded within the unfolding drama of the Peloponnesian War and Socrates' speech contains a retelling of the entirety of Athenian military history within a piece of political rhetoric. It certainly seems significant that Plato places the history within the speech while Thucydides situates the speech within the history. It looks more significant as we have no other funeral oration with a comparable historical section. When the two speeches and their histories are seen in these larger contexts they appear to be in deliberate opposition to each other as if Plato is saying that Thucydides got it backward (inside-out).

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The fact that the history in the *Menexenus* is self-contained and replete with its own independent and coherent philosophical lessons further clues us in to look at the *Menexenus*' speech in opposition to Pericles', not just for the differences in their details, but their diametrically opposed larger frameworks as well.

Conclusion

This paper argues that Aspasia is the key to the interpretation of the *Menexenus*. She was written in as the "real" author of both speeches to tell us how to read the *Menexenus*' and Pericles' speeches together as a single monological dialog. A single speech written by a single author that was cut up tells the reader that the *Menexenus* should make sense as a unified document once it is reassembled. The following facts all substantiate this reading: a) there is a smooth and critical segue between the speeches, b) some of his speech can literally be edited into Pericles' speech to "reconstruct" the "original" Aspasian monological dialog, c) the dialog takes many opportunities to critically interact with Pericles speech, and provides counterexamples and alternate theories to Periclean theses. Writing in the style of a funeral oration is the most obvious way to indicate dialog with Pericles; what better way to signal your interlocutor to your audience than to mimic his famous style? We also saw that Aspasia is the natural choice for this role as someone who was publicly committed to the Periclean position but came to regret it.

While this essay addressed many topics found in the two dialogs, there are many more that can be treated in a similar vein as evidence for the intertextual relationship between the two dialogs: the way Socrates and Pericles think of the ability of a *logos* (as opposed to an *ergon*) to memorialize the dead, their respective stances on education expressed throughout the dialog, their differing views on mythology,[35] the fact that Socrates refers to and invokes the gods (though never by name) while Pericles does not, or how the two speeches differ on the danger of foreign influences, are just some examples.[36] All of these can been seen as pieces of Plato's constructed monological dialog intertextually intertwined with Pericles' speech far more easily than they can be seen only as a single speech making a single independent point. Given all the evidence presented it is reasonable to read Pericles' speech without Plato's but not Plato's without

35 These are treated in Pappas and Zelcer, *Politics and Philosophy*. See also Cliff Robinson's paper in this volume.

36 See also Mara, *The Civic Conversations*, 134.

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Pericles'. Plato's early readers would have instinctively put the two together and made many of the connections made in this paper, as should we.[37]

37 Thanks to the Penn *Menexenus* Workshop where I was given the opportunity to present an early draft of this paper and receive valuable feedback. Thanks especially to Max Robitzsch, Hal Parker and Andreas Avgousti for valuable comments, Étienne Helmer especially for pressing a question discussed in the penultimate section, Peter Simpson, Kevin Z. Moore, Heshey Zelcer, Dahlia Kozlowsky, and Nickolas Pappas for discussion, guidance, and encouragement.

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